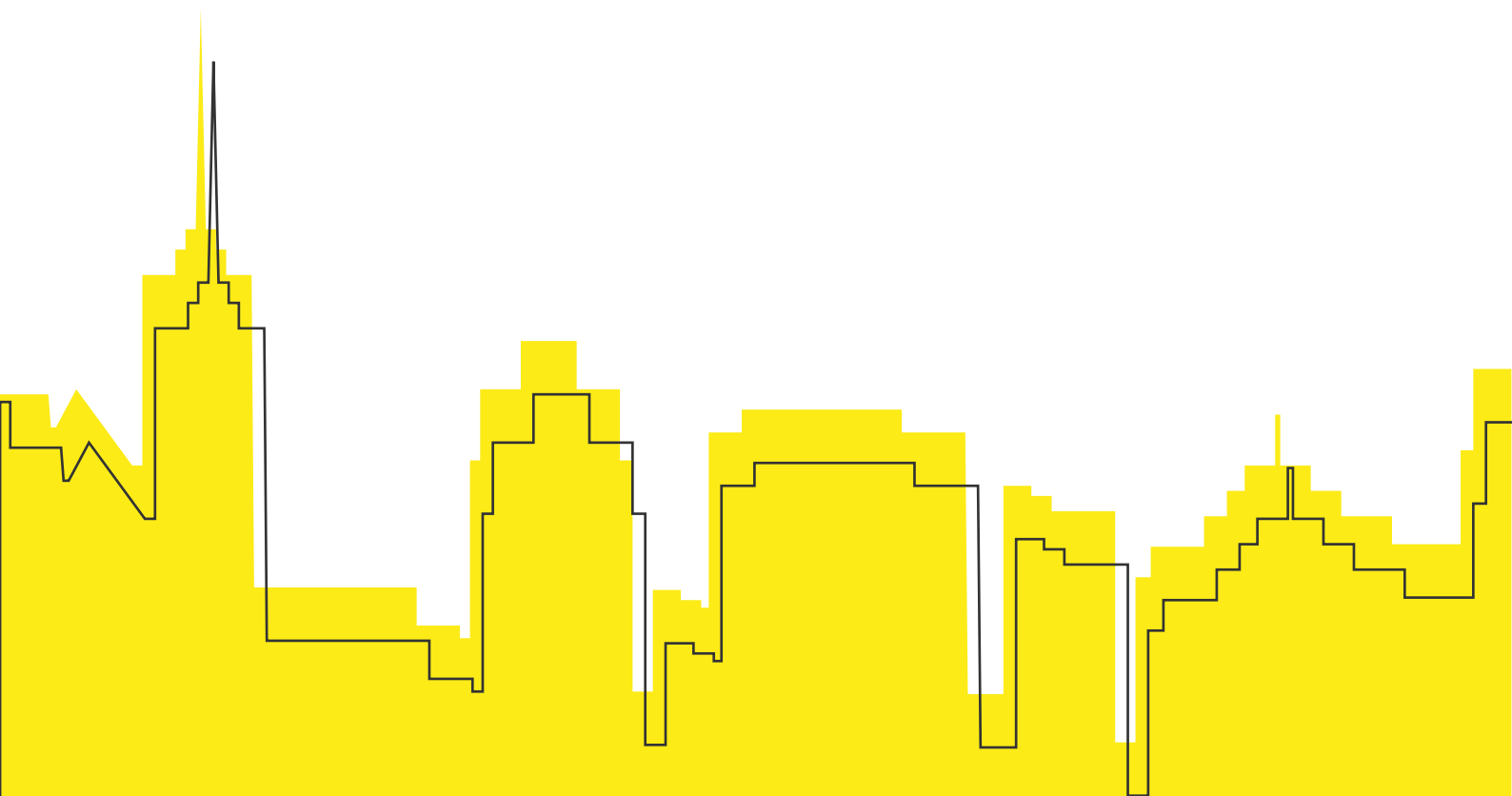


THEORETICAL BASIS

**OF STREET-BASED
YOUTH WORK**



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The theoretical basis of street-based youth work (street work) presented in this publication was created as part of the project *Magic Wand for Street Work* financed by Erasmus+. This project is an ongoing collaboration between five organizations from five different countries with the goal of establishing support elements for quality implementation of street work in different local environments across Europe. We also aim to increase the visibility of street work at local, regional, national and international levels, which we recognize as an indispensable element for the further development of the field. The participating organizations are Zavod Bob (Slovenia), CAI - Conversas Associacao International (Portugal), Beroepsvereniging Kinder - En Jongerenwerkers from (Netherlands), Ceska asociace streetwork, z.s. (Czech Republic) and Udruga za mlade Alfa Albona (Croatia). In May, 2019, during the first stage of the project, we held a training workshop in which we got to know each other's methodologies, practices and trends of street work in our countries. This was also an opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, especially with youth workers from Croatia, who have not yet implemented street work in their country. Throughout the training, organizations became more unified about the concepts of street work and the definitions of some of its common characteristics. Therefore, the content written in this publication is largely a reflection of the results of our training. During the training, a participatory approach was used to present the realities of street work in each country. This included describing the process and activities we rely on to carry out our work, and reviewing the legal basis and systems that are connected with street work in each country. We also defined the approaches, values, goals and mission, target groups and topics that we address with street work.



INTRODUCTION

The content in this booklet is intended for any eager reader who wishes to get a theoretical overview of street work and its implementation in five European countries. Moreover, it is meant to serve as a starting point for the further development of street work activities, approaches and methods.

When reading *Theoretical basis of street work*, you will encounter different ways of defining street work in different countries, along with a brief history of street work in Slovenia, Portugal, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands. You will also become familiar with different approaches, steps of implementation, settings and environments in which we use street work, along with some characteristics that are specific to street workers.

Despite the unique history of street work in each country, and the great diversity of its context, settings, legislative framework and target groups, we made an effort to create a unified basis for all street work practices. Consequently we were able to unify concepts of the values and mission of street work, define the basic characteristics of street workers, and lay out the basic steps that are part of any working process. In the closing section, we drew on our knowledge and experiences to create a set of guidelines which can be taken into account while planning and implementing street work.

All things considered, writers of this booklet share a desire for it to be a useful tool for reflecting, reframing or developing street work practice.



**DEFINING
STREET
WORK**

Street work¹ is a term that describes a variety of approaches all around the world. The more we get to know different practices and share experiences with each other, the more we find out that street work has many faces, since every practice is based on its local context. Nevertheless, they all share the same core. The common characteristic of street work in every country is the fact that we all go out of our institutions to work with young people in their own environment with the purpose of getting to know them, establishing trustful relationships, and understanding and answering their needs and talents.

In **Slovenia**, street work is a way of ensuring the continuous implementation of youth work activities in public spaces (streets, parks, playgrounds and sport fields) where young people gather. The purpose of its implementation is to answer the current needs and talents of the youth. Street work usually reaches individuals and groups that are not reached by other (youth) programmes, or addresses topics other institutions are not focusing on. Implementing street-based youth work means making contact with young people, building and maintaining trusting relationships, and working on topics most relevant to them. Young people are not organized in formal groups and are commonly excluded from public societal discourse about youth.

In the **Netherlands**, street work is a low-threshold method for professionals in the domain of social work, designed to support people in their social participation. The idea behind low-threshold methods is that we have low minimum requirements of people who would like to participate in our activities (e.g. they can join activities even if they are under the influence of cannabis). The methodology focuses on increasing the self-reliance and psychosocial development of the target group, and on reducing the sense of being socially superfluous. Street workers follow the principles of solidarity, humanity, autonomy, unconditionality and respect for fundamental human rights. Street work is an accessible and professional way of being and staying present in the world of the target group, wherever and whenever that may be. Regular social services do not reach the youth, and young people do not use them even when they are eligible for them. Street workers establish contact with the target group, both solicited and unsolicited, and maintain this contact, making it a constant positive factor in the environment of the target group. Street workers have an informative, pedagogical and preventive role

¹ The precise meaning of the term depends on national history and context. Some street work practices belong more in the field of social work, while others emerged from the field of youth work, while still others are more connected with education or community service. This is reflected in the diversity of terms which all describe different forms of street-based based youth work.

in the lives of their target group. If necessary, they also offer (intensive) support to the target group, based on the voluntary commitment of the individuals they work with. Street workers employ an ecological approach in which the relationship between people and the environment is central. In this approach, they focus on 1) informal caregivers of clients, 2) the livability of the living environment, and 3) on other professionals who are involved with the clients (Rauwerdink-Nijland & Metz, 2019).

In **Czech republic** street work is a method of social work on the street, in parks, railway stations, in the so called 'natural environment' of a target group. The target group consists of people who need counseling and help.

Street workers actively search for clients and take the initiative to contact them. This searching, which includes 'mapping' the locality and detecting the need for social services, should always precede establishing a social service. Street work is mobile – the locality may vary according to the needs of the target group and other circumstances (e.g. season). It is crucial to be in regular contact with the target group in order to recognize changes in the individual client.

Street workers are also called outreach social workers (the literal translation from Czech is 'terrain social workers') or contact workers. Social workers working in low-threshold social services (outreach programmes, low-threshold facilities for children and youth, low-threshold day centres, contact centres) belong to this category, and their work is defined by the Law on social service no. 108/2006 Sb. Street workers accompany their clients: this means supporting them in difficult social situations and helping them handle everyday troubles.

The 'office' of a street worker is the natural environment of his/her clients – streets, parks, clubs, gaming pubs, railway stations, bus stations, etc. The aim of a street worker is to search for and contact groups and individuals facing difficult social situations who are at risk of social exclusion or other negative social phenomena. A street worker focuses especially on those individuals who are not willing or able to seek help by themselves.

Contact work is a service that aims to establish relationships and work specifically with individuals (or groups of individuals) who keep away from standard institutional assistance. Contact work can be provided in two basic forms: mobile and stationary.

Mobile contact work includes outreach social work or street work. Stationary contact work includes social work in a facility, e.g. a low-threshold facility for children and youth, contact centre for drug users, low-threshold day centre for various target groups (typically homeless people).

In **Portugal** street-based youth workers are people with diverse professional backgrounds who use the street as their workplace. The street – the youth’s living space – is where street-based youth workers can observe, approach, create and maintain trusting and educative relationships with young people, particularly those who are in vulnerable situations and face discrimination, stigmatization, poverty or exclusion.

Change often generates fear and uncertainty, which prevents people from having a clear reading of things and acting. For this reason there is a great deal of resistance from the social organizations in power to accept street-based youth work and its role in the reconstruction of the social bond between young people and adults. It is up to the street-based youth worker to grasp the importance of their work and defend its unique social function. We can only present street work methodology as a viable option once we have proven its value. And its value lies in the way we approach individuals and respect them as human beings with choices and wills.

Street-based youth work is a methodology of educative interaction between the street workers and their target population. It incorporates tools from informal and non-formal education practices in order to effect behavior change, promote assertiveness and empower young people. The effectiveness of its methods mainly depends on the street-based youth worker’s profile: their conscience, motivations, and strengths.

How are we to educate the youth, to transmit values and cultural inheritance to young people, when the reality they live in is often characterized by poor living conditions, poor public health, precarious employment, unemployment and often illegal employment? Urban chaos serves as a place for selling drugs and their use. Young people are exposed to situations of violence and crime without alternative forms of leisure activities in their surroundings. Many of the young people we accompany are early school leavers, young people who are excluded from their school environment before reaching the end of obligatory education or reach the age limit for inclusion in education.

Using non-formal and informal educational tools, street-based youth workers roam the streets, neighbourhoods, slums, train stations, corners, the outsides of major shopping centres, and squares, using them as educational spaces, reaching out to young people and building educative relationships based on trust. In order to really engage with young people in these interactions, we use basic approaches of the social street work methodology: social presence (we are present in the spaces used by young people), educational follow-up (building a trusting relationship, developing projects together regarding young people's needs and talents, and initiating an educational process with them), and solving concrete problems (school and learning support, promoting and supporting people's organizational and creative talents, and cooperation with partners such as social services, social and educational groups and organizations).

Young people feel excluded from a society which, instead of helping them grow, creates injustice and rejection. The role of the street-based youth worker is to support young people in their development through an educational process, the goal of which is reaching autonomy. Street-based youth workers' policy is working *with* the youth, not *for* the youth. Working *for* young people may create dependency, which is not aligned with the goal of reaching autonomy. Undoubtedly, we are empathetic with young people in the sense that we are sensitive to their problems and needs, but it is desirable to teach them how to fish, as the saying goes, so that they can feed themselves for a lifetime and do so autonomously. The fight against poverty is nothing if it does not involve the reconstruction of personal identity and thereby focus on combating the causes rather than the symptoms.

To conclude the chapter in which we defined street-based youth work, we offer the following, thought-provoking quote: 'Characteristic of street work is that it continues where others stop.'

The values of street work

There is no real universal theoretical framework on this matter, but we can say that here and there social actors have, at a given point in time, favoured an 'extra muros'² approach, with a strong ethical drive formed of respect and tolerance for the most excluded populations. (Giraldi, de Boevé, 2008).

When defining and understanding street work, we soon come across the values that represent the core of what we do. We could say that values are the most universal element among all our different practices, contexts and realities. So when practicing or reflecting on street work, acknowledging our values is one of the first steps we have to make. In this section, we define some of the core values that all street workers identify with.

Respect - is the ability to value and honor the young person, to accept them as they are, even if we do not share their opinions or approve of everything they say and do. It means not judging someone by their attitudes, behaviors or thoughts, or expecting them to be or to do otherwise.

Even if street workers do not approve of some of the attitudes, behaviors, thoughts, or decisions made by young people, they should respect their integrity, work towards their inclusion (in street work activities, into what interests them), and support them in their path. In our job, it is important not to make decisions for young people, but to support them in defining the various choices available to them and try to inform them about challenges that follow. This does not mean that we overlook their hateful and harmful behaviors or beliefs, but that we do not exclude or devalue young people because of them. In other words, we maintain their personal dignity unconditionally. On the other hand, the street worker leads by example, encouraging young people to behave respectfully towards others and the environment where they hang out.

Diversity - signifies the fact that different types of things or people are being included in something and that people can have many different ideas or opinions about something.

Street workers work in different environments with all kinds of people and value the contribution of this diversity. While working, they encourage learning about diversity and intercultural acceptance. It is very important, while addressing a particular topic, to raise awareness among young people about the value of looking at things from different perspectives.

Trust - is the belief that someone is good and honest and will not harm you, or that something is safe and reliable.

²Can be understood as 'outside the walls'.

Trust is the basis for creating a firm working relationship with young people. This is why, in the initial phases of street work, building and maintaining trust is crucial. Young people need to trust that the street workers are working for their benefit. It is about creating a safe space where young people are willing to share their stories and try new things, make mistakes and learn from them.

Partnership - is a way of working with youth and not for/instead of youth, where they are active partners in their own support, rather than passive recipients.

This means that in the relationship between street worker and young person, the participants are equals (unlike in a relationship between student and teacher). This partnership is characterized by reciprocity: the street worker is responsible for process and the participants are responsible for content.

Even though street workers all have their own assumptions about youth, we do not narrow the selection of activities into which we include them (e.g. sometimes we assume that someone will not be willing to participate in our art activities, but we go and ask them to join us if they want; or sometimes we think somebody needs to do more sports activities, but that does not mean that we can force them).

Active participation - is the involvement of an individual or a group of individuals in their own governance or other activities.

We carry out activities only if young people actively participate in them. We encourage participation in all phases (preparation, implementation, and evaluation) of an activity, though it is common that not everyone will do so. Participants often come and go from an activity very freely, but this doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to include them in its preparation and evaluation. As mentioned before, participants are the ones who decide what topics we will address with our activities. For example, even if we think one of the young people should be more physically active, we cannot force them to join our sports activities. They are the main actors in their projects, while our role is supportive.

Empowerment - is the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you.

The empowerment of young people is the final goal of all youth workers. As a street worker you often work to empower those who are the most powerless, whose voices

are cut off from society. Because our target group is often excluded from state-support systems (education, welfare, etc.), we bring empowerment to them in their living environment. Despite the challenges they face, we help them discover their assets, which they can use when battling and overcoming these challenges.

Street work is characterized by strong ethical values: tolerance towards marginalized young people and respect for their fundamental human rights (Metz, 2011). Street work is based on a relationship that reflects all the aforementioned values. It is evident that we greatly appreciate the people we work with, both participants and other stakeholders (e.g. colleagues and professionals from other organizations). On the journey to achieve our mission, the core values of street work are lighthouses that guide us through the sea of different ways of working with the youth.

The mission of street work

Despite the variety of approaches to practising street work, we were able to identify the mission that they all try to achieve. Setting a mission is crucial, since it is the guiding light that helps us accomplish the desired goals of our activities

The mission of street work is to improve young people's wellbeing by giving them power and build bridges between them and the rest of society.

At the participants' level, the goals of street work are:

- **To prevent young people from getting lost.** Working often with youngsters aged 10 to 15 means that street workers carry out a lot of prevention activities. By informing youngsters, we strengthen the safety factors and thus reduce opportunities which would lead to risky (and in the end criminal) behaviour, social hardship and other problems.
- **To provide young people a safe space for transitioning to adulthood.** Working with young people also means supporting their transition process from adolescence to adulthood. Nowadays this transition is quite complex and extended, and a lot of young people face multiple obstacles on their path to social and economic independence.

Overcoming the lack of systemic support, street workers offer them support to finish or make informed choices about further education, help them explore and gain insight into different vocational possibilities and the situation on the labour market, and also talk to them about financial management and housing plans.

- **To make young people visible and their voices heard.** A significant part of the target group for street work are youth that are mostly excluded from institutional leisure activities and do not participate in civil society organizations. They are largely socially neglected and their interests and needs are therefore publicly overlooked or absent from public discourse. Since street workers do get in touch with them and are therefore familiar with their wishes and needs, they have a responsibility to be their advocates and make young people's voices heard on a wider scale. The activities to support this can take the form of social marketing, like creating postcards made by locals with the intention of spreading a positive image of an otherwise stigmatized neighbourhood.

- **To offer young people opportunities to spend quality leisure time.** Street workers enter environments where infrastructure for spending quality free time is less developed (there are fewer or no sports centers or pools, small libraries, no youth centers, parks are not as equipped as those in city centres, etc.), or it is unavailable because the youth cannot afford to pay the entry fee. This is why street workers provide various materials (e.g. football balls, board games, material for drawing or crafting) and encourage young people to use them or join in the activities. This is important because, through their involvement in different activities, young people develop different interests and are at that time not involved in risky behavior.

- **To support young people in their development.** As mentioned above, we implement activities through which young people develop their interests and skills (e.g. communication skills, crafting skills, etc.). Above and beyond that, however, we also talk to them and reflect on their personal, physical, and social development, and create situations where they can test and improve themselves. A good way to do this, for example, is to organize activities where cooperation with others is needed in order to win.

- **To teach and encourage young people to be responsible for their own actions.** Because young people actively participate in street work activities, they sometimes take over some tasks (e.g. finding a suitable referee for football tournament). No matter how

successfully they accomplished their task, we reflect and discuss with them about what happened and why, and how this affected them and the people who were involved.

- **To work with young people and community stakeholders in order to build bridges between them and society, so that they become included and an active part of society.** Through continuous cooperation with community stakeholders and the youth, we establish a mutual understanding of each other and a safe space where young people feel comfortable expressing their opinions and stakeholders understand that young people's opinions are valuable to their work. In this process, young people get positive feedback about their involvement in social processes, which encourages them to actively participate in social processes in the future.

- **To create opportunities and space for their talents to develop.** Besides attention to young people's needs, there is a complimentary, asset based approach that enables us to recognize the talents, potential, or resources of young people. By recognizing this, the first precondition for establishing a platform where young people can develop their talents is set. This is especially relevant for street workers working with disadvantaged youth who lack social, economic, or cultural capital and thus do not have as many possibilities to explore and improve their talents. This can mean, for example, taking them to a production studio and mentoring them to create music or video.

At the strategic level, the goals of street work are:

- **To network and cooperate in order to be more efficient and raise awareness about the value of street-based youth work.** This means presenting street work and its impact to organizations from other fields and areas of work and ultimately cooperating with them to benefit the youth. We usually cooperate with schools, police, social work centres, etc.

- **To increase the qualification of street work as a profession.** In the process of professionalization, norms for qualifications of street workers are established, trainings for street work are implemented, and ways of validating the knowledge about street work are defined. Meanwhile, street workers are also working on increasing the recognition of street work as a profession among the general and professional public.

Individual practices may follow other goals that are specific to their context of working with youth.

History of street work in each partner country

The roots of street work go way back to 19th century, when humanitarians would inform young people about their programmes and try to encourage their involvement (Kaudman, 2001 as cited in Crimmens et al., 2004). The approach was further developed in the late 1950's, when street gangs emerged on the streets of USA, and social workers started to go out of their institutions and onto the streets in order to reach them (Hren, 1996 as cited in Vodeb, 2017). Soon the approach was transferred to the UK, where youth workers went out of youth clubs to inform young people about activities and possibilities for youth engagement. In the 1980's, street work became an important approach in the field of harm reduction due to the growing (ab)use of psychoactive substances (Smith, 2005 as cited in Vodeb, 2017). Since street work is strongly embedded within national and local contexts, we present a different historical background from each partner organization - it may serve to better understand the context, reflect upon the practice or as an inspiration to develop new street work practices.

Slovenia

Street work, or outreach work, has a relatively long history in Slovenia - social workers were reaching people at their homes and offered them the support they needed. Out of a desire for higher professional recognition and a status comparable to some other professions (e.g. psychology), social workers started to focus on institutionalized approaches and forgot about outreach, which happened around the beginning of the second world war (Milošević Arnold, 2009 as cited in Vodeb, 2017). In the early 90's, during Slovenia's transition to independence, new practices of street work started to emerge that were mainly focused on children and young people (e.g. Skala³, Alpin) (Gajić, 2017). At the turn of the millennium, a practice of harm reduction was established by the association DrogArt⁴. For some years this was the extent of street-based youth work in Slovenia⁵. In 2012, the Municipality of Ljubljana detected a situation when a specific public space became a regular gathering place for big groups of young people, forming crowds of 300 to 500 people on Friday nights. Local residents complained about these

³ To learn more about their work, see: <https://skala.je/vzgojne-dejavnosti/redne-dejavnosti/minibus-veselja/>

⁴ To learn more about their work, see: <https://www.drogart.org/>

⁵ There were some practices of outreach work done by organizations in the health and social domains (e.g. Kralji ulice working with homeless people, Stigma working with drug users). To learn more about Kralji ulice, you can visit <http://www.kraljiulice.org/>; for more on Stigma, see <https://drustvo-stigma.si/o-nas/>

gatherings because of the noise, public urination, trash, etc. Rather than implementing security measures, the Municipality of Ljubljana decided to tackle this challenge through youth work (The contribution of youth work to preventing marginalisation and violent radicalisation, 2017)⁶. For this reason the Network Youth Street was established, a network of 6 organizations working in the field of youth work that were ready to address this situation and develop new approaches. Over the next three years, Zavod Bob, the coordinator of Network, developed new approaches and launched new projects that answered a variety of young people's needs in different local communities. Along with this, Network Youth Street and Zavod Bob carried out a variety of support activities (e.g. street work trainings, public events, dialogue with decision makers) with different organizations in Ljubljana and beyond. In 2015 Zavod Bob started carrying out international activities in the field of street work and in 2019 became a representative for Slovenia in Dynamo International Network of Social Street Workers. A growing need for street work and other support activities led to further development and growth of practices all around Slovenia. In 2016/2017 we had recorded 13 organizations implementing street work activities (Vodeb, 2017), a number which is still growing.

Portugal

Social street work aims to engage a target population or community in finding solutions, without giving in to welfarism. It was introduced in Portugal in the late 1990's, when the Psychosocial Social School of Lisbon began hosting professionals from 'Club de Prévention' (Prevention Clubs) in Paris, as well as professionals that were working with young homeless people in London.

Throughout most of the 20-century, the concept of street work was based on activities focused on symptoms rather than causes. Parish social services, philanthropic institutions, volunteers or social assistants ran services (such as providing meals, clothes, or shelter) for poor children that lived or spent the day on the streets. This concept of street work was based on assistance to poor people linked to the charity of the Portuguese Catholic Church. In the 1930's, vagabondage was declared illegal and charity providers brought their activities and services indoors. Poor children were put in shelters and some shelters for young adults and people with mental health problems appeared. The heavy emphasis on assistentialist approaches only began to slowly shift after the revolution in 1974.

⁶ To learn more, see: http://www.injuve.es/sites/default/files/informe_coe.pdf, p. 40.

Even then, despite the democratization of the state and the eventual recognition of the social street work methodology as a tool of social intervention, local and national authorities still mostly supported assistentialist projects. Work on the streets was mainly based on outreaching target populations, especially children and young people, for centres offering leisure time activities.

In the beginning of the 80's, teams of educators started to work with street children in their own environment. A Portuguese NGO named IAC (Children Support Institute) began a programme in the Lisbon city centre, from where it spread to origin neighbourhoods in the periphery where the children came from. At the same time, new social problems began to appear, such as homelessness, drug abuse, and AIDS, so street teams began targeting specific groups of people with approaches based on preventing damaging behaviors or attitudes, but without a holistic perspective or solution.

In late 1997, Conversas de Rua launched a program of street-based youth work granted by drug prevention and social exclusion funds. These programs ran up until the crisis of 2011, after which only assistentialist indoor projects kept their funding. Since then, some projects and youth centres have employed outreach strategies, but not really street-based youth work. As of 2019, the street work methodology is limited to the academic field and a few field projects.

Netherlands

Street work in the Netherlands emerged in the 1960s in response to groups hanging out on the street and being seen as a nuisance with no connection to society as a whole. Outreach work refers to professionals leaving the relatively safe and structured work environment of their organizations in order to enter the world of the target group and adapt to their rules. As a method, street work forms the basis of a number of important contemporary approaches in the outreach of social work in the Netherlands.

The 'Youth Prevention Team' (JPT), for example, addresses young people with multiple problems, offering them intensive counseling for three months and directing them towards suitable help. Nowadays, the more or less common outreach work performed by social neighborhood teams has its origins in street work.

The most common approach in the Netherlands is Outreach Youth Work, which is implemented in most cities as a method that focuses on all young people from 13 to 23

years old with insufficient leisure time on the street or at school, preventing crime, drug problems, and supporting them in the transition to the labour market.

Czech Republic


The beginning of street work in the Czech Republic dates back to the 1990s. After the end of communist era, Czech social workers started to learn from colleagues abroad, especially in Germany. In 1994 the government established the position of 'social assistant' as part of an experimental project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, mainly under the supervision of two employees of its social prevention department, Tereza Čákrtová and Zdena Bednářová. The role of a social assistant was to provide specific outreach social work with older school children and youth at risk of social deviance. At that time, the social assistant had been defined as a specialist in a district (county, municipal) office who works with target groups in their environment and in 'their time'. The target groups were children and young people who spent most of their time in the street and led 'risky' lifestyles: asocial or antisocial behaviour, communicating with others in an annoying way, wearing provocative clothes, etc.

At the same time, street work started to develop within non-governmental organizations. Among the first NGOs to introduce street work were the ones working with drug addicts. Later the method spread to other target groups, such as sex workers, homeless people, Roma people, and unorganized youth in the streets.

During this period there was no established street work methodology, and the effectiveness of outreach approaches relied on the energy, involvement and enthusiasm of individual social workers, government employees and NGO workers. Systematic education in the field was still missing, and schools and universities didn't offer studies/training in street work. That's why an effort was made to contact colleagues from countries with a longer tradition of street work. A very lucky decision (if not a key decision) was made to establish cooperation with colleagues from the Saxon Social Academy in Germany. The Saxon Social Academy (in cooperation with experts from the old federal countries) drew up a complex street work education programme for social assistants. Based on this education, contacts and study visits to Germany were organized, and the first low-threshold facilities/centres for children and youth were founded in 1995, both state-regional and NGO.

In April, 1997, the Czech Association of Street work (CAS) was founded as a professional organization, joining together academics and experts from the field. The aim of CAS was to create a platform for dialogue between experts on various levels, to be an umbrella for supervision, to work on street work methodology and also to foster education and information exchange, etc.

After years of existence without a legal framework, street work was codified in the Law on Social Service 108/2006. Street work standards were set, as well as the financial rules. Accredited street work programmes can now be financed by the state (regional government).



**WHO:
UNDERSTANDING
THE TARGET
GROUP**

To better understand and improve the implementation of street work, we believe it is necessary to know its main determinants. In other words, we need to know the specifics of whom we work with (young people and other stakeholders) and where we work (mainly public spaces). In the following chapters we discuss the main characteristics of each determinant and reflect upon how it affects street work.

With whom do we work?

When considering street work, we detected two groups we address:

1. The primary target group of young people that hang out on the streets and/or live on the streets.
2. The indirect target group of so-called stakeholders, i.e. actors who possess strategic influence and play a supporting role in the implementation of street work (local police, municipalities, communities, schools, families and parents, friends and peer groups, other public services, states, youth NGOs, cultural organizations, libraries, decision makers, councils, political parties, parishes, welfare systems, etc.).

The nature and composition of the target group (young people) varies between different countries – by age, needs, background (e.g. socio-economic, ethical, migrant), harmful habits and behaviours (e.g. crime, drug abuse, self-harm, sex work). However, we can recognize some **common characteristics when considering the population of young people:**

1. Intensive physical, mental and cognitive, social and sexual development of the individual with an emphasis on their identity (exploration of social roles, growing awareness of how others perceive them in contrast to how they perceive themselves) (Erikson, 2014).
2. A period of secondary socialization when a young person takes on new roles, standards, and beliefs shaped not only by their family, but also by their peer group, school, and the dominant ideology (Ule, 2008).

3. A period full of transitions to full adulthood with the aim of becoming a full member of society: building a stable personal and social identity, taking on complex and wholesome social roles, entering the labour market, becoming economically independent, participating in society (Ule, 2008).

4. Current social and historical conditions that influence the period of youth: risk society, globalization, individualization, the growing importance of markets and consumerism, growing competitiveness and productivity, pluralistic lifestyles and endless possibilities without any predictable paths, so called yo-yo transitions⁷. All of this, combined with a lack of safety factors, means that young people face constant risk and uncertainty (Ule, 2008; Ule, 2011; Wyn and White, 1997).

Understanding youth as a period full of new roles, tasks, and challenges is a precondition for street workers to be able to reach their target group and adapt their approach in ways that answer the needs and support the talents of young people. It also enables street workers to show comprehension and acceptance towards their target group, which is the basis for building trustworthy relationships. Besides knowing and understanding the youth in general, it is also important that street workers know the specifics of the target group they are addressing. This enables a holistic approach. Below are some examples of specific target groups and their descriptions for each partner organization.

The target group of street work in **Slovenia** is young people (from 10 to 30 years old) who spend their leisure time in public spaces⁸, particularly neighborhoods, playgrounds, parks, and grass-roots venues. Within this target group there are subgroups, presented with their characteristics in the table below.

⁷ Yo-yo transitions are typical of postmodernity. This means that the most important milestones in the transition to full adulthood (e.g. finishing education, entering the labour market, creating a lifetime partnership, building a home, creating a family) overlap, intersect, and repeat.

⁸ In Slovenia the phenomenon of children/young people living on the street is not as common, so street work mostly targets those who spend a lot of their time on the street, but the street itself is not their only living environment

Subgroup	Risk factors or obstacles	Talents or assets
Youngsters (between 10 and 14 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aggressive behaviours - possibility of school failure - poor social skills - low parental involvement, poor parental skills - low socioeconomic status of family - low social capital, low opportunities for different experiences - living in deprived neighborhoods, limited or no public services (e.g. day centers) - migrant background - at risk of marginalization, disenfranchisement, or exclusion - at risk of developing some deviant behaviours (e.g. addiction, vandalism, criminal activities) - NEET⁹ - recreational or regular (few times per week) use and abuse of psychoactive substances - without regular income, debts due to bad money management - criminal activities (e.g. drug dealing, stealing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high interest and motivation on the topics/ activities relevant to them - open towards suggestions and new experiences - full of ideas, innovative, creative, flexible, out of the box way of thinking - believe that there can be a positive change - actively and regularly participating in the activities - physically active - wide (though not very strong or effective) peer support - involvement in the education system or effective) peer support - involvement in the education system - interest in specific themes/activities and willingness to invest effort, energy and time into those themes/ activities - strong opinions on topics relevant to them - a lot of leisure time - well-developed social skills

⁹ Not in education, employment, or training.

Subgroup	Risk factors or obstacles	Talents or assets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - living day by day - no strong peer group or support system - socially and/or economically deprived families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - often share goods and belongings with their peers - positive attitude towards non-governmental organizations - skillful with social networks
Young adults (between 20 and 30 years old)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - potential to vandalize or violate public order due to lack of information, activities or bad public infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-organized - perceptive, comprehensive - critical view towards contemporary society - well-developed social skills

Individuals belonging to the described target subgroups are more often at-risk, and street workers in Slovenia pay special attention to them, especially for individual support. Apart from that, they also organize many group activities that different young people participate in, including those without obstacles, risk factors, deviant behaviours, and who do not face disenfranchisement.¹⁰

The primary target group of outreach youth work in the **Netherlands** is young people aged 10 to 23 who are characterized as unbound, socially excluded, marginalized, uninvolved, or antisocial (Milburn et al., 2000; Whelan, 2010 as cited in Metz, 2011). Furthermore, we can specify five subgroups within this target group (Ferwerda, 2010 as cited in Metz, 2011):

- Annoying youth – young people who hang out in the neighborhoods, are occasionally noisy, and do not care much for their environment. Sometimes they are involved in minor fights or commit minor vandalism.

¹⁰ Street workers recognize two main positive aspects of this kind of group action: firstly, the presence of positive role models within a group of peers, and secondly, that street work activities are not stigmatized

- Nuisance youth – young people who are provocative, sometimes emphatically. They often harass bystanders by insulting or intimidating them. These young people also regularly commit vandalism, use violence, and are deliberately guilty of light forms of crime.
- Criminal youth – this group consists partly of young people who have been in contact with the police before. The motivation for criminal behavior here is primarily financial gain. The members of this group commit serious crimes and do not shy away from using violence.
- Invisible youth – young people who need support but do not cause any inconvenience or crime, so their request for help is sometimes overlooked. These are socially isolated youngsters, youngsters with mental health problems, and early school leavers.
- Absent youth – young people with no access to facilities, or who do not use the facilities they could potentially benefit from. These people can be found in neighborhoods and rural environments where facilities for young people are absent or no longer meet their interests and needs.

According to **Czech** law, a person is considered a child up to the age of 18. Street work services apply to children and youth and can be provided up to the age of 26. Organizations united under Ceska asociace streetwork, z.s. work with children and youth from 6 to 26 years old who spend most of their time in the streets. Their participants are so-called non-organized youth and youth with fewer opportunities. Their time is not divided between school, work, and leisure, and their socio-economic situation separates them from mainstream society. They are at risk of marginalization and social exclusion, as well as various types of addiction, criminal activity, vandalism, hooliganism, bullying, extremism (both right- and left-wing), including religious extremism and radicalization.

Because street work is still in its infancy in **Croatia**, there is no specific definition for the primary target group of street work, but the Croatian Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy defines youth as people aged between 15 and 30 years old.

In **Portugal** there isn't a specific law at the national level concerning children and youth on the street, but there is a larger legal framework that concerns children and youth 'in danger'. The situations covered by the spirit and letter of the law are wider than just 'being on the street', so the latter could be one of the concrete cases that fulfill the legal concept of 'danger'. At least one of the following elements should be present in order to activate the Law of the Protection of the Endangered Children and Youth for young people living in the streets: (1) being abandoned or living life 'on their own'; (2) physical and/or sexual abuse; (3) lack of affection and care; (4) being subjected directly or indirectly to behaviors that affect their security or emotional balance; (5) activities or consumption of substances that affect their development (at various levels) and that the parents/guardians cannot prevent.

To ensure the quality of street work with the described target groups, organizations also have to target the **indirect target group, i.e. stakeholders** with strategic influence and a supportive role in the implementation of street work. Who we target, why, and how depends on the specific goal of a street work activity, specific target groups, their needs and assets, etc. Below are some examples of stakeholders or partner organizations:

Who?	Why?
<p>Decision makers: relevant state departments, councils, political parties, governments, municipalities, other relevant officials, communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - better representation and work in the interest of primary target group - important systemic changes for street work and its target group (e.g. changing legal frameworks, executive measures, priorities within strategic documents) - financial support (e.g. public tenders)
<p>Important (public) institutions: welfare institutions, social centers, educational institutions - primary and secondary schools, detention centres, community homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being informed about each other's work - working together when it is in the best interest of target group
<p>General public: by-passers, neighbours, relatives, potential employers, donors, sponsors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being informed about the street work profession - higher trust towards street workers - easier first steps of street work when entering communities - higher possibility people will reach out when they need support - understanding where we spend public money
<p>Professional public: university professors, students, researchers, experts in relevant fields (e.g. social work, youth work, social pedagogy, non-formal education, andragogy and pedagogy, psychology)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students of relevant professions/disciplines get to know street work - development of the field of street work (new research, methods, tools, activities, ...) - involving street work in other professions/disciplines - easier collaboration between disciplines

Who?	Why?
<p>Organizations and individuals working in areas where street work is implemented: non-governmental and public organizations who are in contact with the target group (e.g. local school, local police, social centers)</p> <p>or whose activities are relevant for target group (e.g. sport centers, culture and street-art movements, libraries, parishes, music studios)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understanding that we all work in the best interest of target group - supporting target group in areas that street workers are not covering - being a source of information for each other - understanding target group within different settings and environments - organizing joint activities when it is in the best interest of target group - connecting different target groups (e.g. elderly, people with mental health issues, migrants ...) - establishing local networks that can form the backbone of a community
<p>Families and parents, peer groups and friends</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - higher trust towards street workers - being informed about target group - getting to know and working with individuals that have the most important influence over target group

Organizations find different ways to address these potential partners, depending on the nature of the indirect target group. For example, a description of street work in a local newspaper is a suitable method of reaching parents and families, while memes on social media are way more effective at reaching peer groups and friends. Furthermore, an organization or team of street workers has to take into account its competences and capacity to carry out activities aimed at indirect target groups (e.g. it is important to finish projects with organizations in the local community that we started). Here are some of the possible activities aimed at indirect target groups:

- meetings,
- information and awareness campaigns using different media (e.g. local newspapers, posters, fliers, social media, radio, television),
- social marketing,
- advocacy,
- public events (e.g. concerts, sports matches, conferences, round table discussions),
- presentations (e.g. at events, during school lessons, lectures, etc.).

Where: public spaces – setting and meaning for young people

When defining street work, it is important to look at the spaces in which it takes place. We often say that we work 'on the streets', but what we mean is that we work in a variety of spaces that are in public use. To better understand where we work, we need to get familiar with the concept of public spaces.

What we define as public space is constantly changing. A public space is a space that was traditionally set as an open area accessible to everyone, such as streets, squares, shopping districts, community districts, parks, etc. But public spaces could also be defined as privately owned spaces that serve as public spaces. These kinds of spaces are shopping centres, galleries, art centres, etc. What defines a public space is not its ownership or legal status, but rather its function - that different people can use it for different activities (Worpole and Knox 2007).

Public spaces are a very important element of any community: they act like a kind of social glue. Public spaces have a self-organized public role and act as a resource where

values and experiences can be made and shared (Worpole and Knox, 2007). According to Oldenburg (1997), the informal public place where individuals gather acts as a 'third space' between our homes and workplaces, and has important meanings for the whole community in that it:

- helps to connect the neighbourhood;
- acts as an entry point to all newcomers and visitors of the neighbourhood, a place where they can get information and directions;
- is a space where people with similar interests can connect and serves as a pillar for the development of local culture;
- represents a space where all people come in contact with each other and as such enables intergenerational connections and cooperation;
- helps to take care of the neighbourhood, being the place where you can find people who are active in the neighbourhood and know a lot about what is going on, and it is also the first place where people gather in cases of emergencies;
- is a place of entertainment, where conversation that is often light, fun, and informative in nature can lead to stronger ties between individuals in the community, which in turn enables the continuation of the community space;
- can offer a place for political discourse, encouraging active citizenship and active participation in the community.

On the whole, a public space can offer a lot of positive things. Everyone has a possibility to express their culture and identity and to learn about diversity. Public spaces are an excellent place to work with young people, because we can reach them even if they are not in employment, education, or training.

When talking about youth, we must keep in mind that leisure time and extra-institutional, or non-institutionally organized, forms of socializing play an important role in this period of one's life. The public space has an important socializing and symbolic role for young people (Segulin, Rakovec, Vodeb, 2014). It is crucial that activities for youth are also carried out in this type of environment in order to help foster informal connections between young people and within the community. Street workers mostly work during their clients' leisure time. In the case of young people attending school, this usually means in the afternoon and sometimes also in the evening and during the night. Those working with homeless and NEET youth will often work throughout the entire day, depending on their and their clients' schedules. A street worker should be able

to recognize the potential of a public space. Their role is to redefine the public space with temporary and long-term community interventions. Through such interventions, the public space gains a different quality. Street workers can help make the resources of public spaces available to everyone, especially young people who often cannot get access to such resources elsewhere.

The types of public spaces where street workers perform their activities vary, as they are specific to each micro-local environment. Street workers should always do research on the background of a community and its history before entering their public space as street workers. When entering a new environment, street workers should map out the locations that are important to the community (e.g. a shop, post office, ATM, local bakery, a playground where young people gather, a bench where older people sit, etc.). This gives an important insight into the specifics and unspoken rules of the community we are entering.

It is good to be aware of the fact that the success of a public space does not depend only on architects and urban planners, but also on the people who use it. After all, it is only the latter who determine whether or not they will use this space as their own (Worpole and Knox, 2007). A street worker can contribute to a public space in order to establish the conditions for maximum participation in the activities that take place there. Co-creating the space we live in strengthens people's feeling of belonging to the community. By co-creating their public space, people are simultaneously laying down the foundations for continual, quality social interactions. People that are more involved have a stronger sense of belonging (Vale, 2008).

As street-based youth workers, we need to appreciate the role of public spaces as 'social glue' while also realizing that some groups are constantly (under)privileged compared to others. The understanding of antisocial behaviour is different from street to street. It is important to realize which groups are marginalized within a certain space and to understand that these groups are also a big part of the community (Worpole and Knox, 2007).



**THE STREET
WORK APPROACH**

Individual, group, and community approaches in street work

Street work can be directed primarily **towards individuals, groups** (de Boevé in Toussaint, 2012; Rhodes, 1996) **or communities** (Street work - An international handbook, 2009 as cited in Preventivno terensko delo usmerjeno v skupnost, 2017). In each partner country we recognize all three approaches, but the proportional emphasis we give them varies.

An orientation towards individuals aims to provide support for young people facing different challenges in order to encourage positive changes in their behaviour and empower them to become proactive in solving their personal challenges. This approach is grounded in a trustful relationship between street worker and young person in which the former respects the young person's rights and personal borders. (Križanič, 2009, Street work - An international handbook 2009 as cited in Preventivno terensko delo usmerjeno v skupnost, 2017). This approach is based on making first contact and building a trustful relationship based on confidentiality and respect for the individual's rights and personal need to be emancipated (Street work - An international handbook, 2009 as cited in Preventivno terensko delo usmerjeno v skupnost, 2017). During the process, the street worker can use different techniques and tools to achieve this goal. Through conversation, a youth worker can get to know more about the individual's needs and resources, and can help the individual to identify them. This can lead to positive changes in a person's life. Working with the individual is the main orientation of street work in the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

Working with (informal) groups is an orientation based on group activities that promote shared social experiences and consequently develop trust within a group of participants. A group activity can be a door-opener in establishing a trustful relationship between young people and a street worker. Its ultimate goal is to empower the whole group, the members of which will then be capable of giving mutual support to each other (and to other individuals). Since a group orientation is common in Mediterranean and southern countries (Street work - An international handbook, 2009 as cited in Preventivno terensko delo usmerjeno v skupnost, 2017), it is no surprise that this is one of the main approaches within Slovene street work practice. In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, group activities are used primarily as a supplement to individual work and are not the main focus. Moreover, they are implemented mostly as prevention and empowerment activities.

Working in a community with a variety of stakeholders and their organizations aims to effect change within the community towards community development and empowerment. As modern communities become increasingly alienated, the question of how to connect people and increase their ability for cooperation arises (Križanič, 2009). Work in a community is based on the assumption that the local community is more than a set of objects; it is also a group of people who face similar problems and have similar needs (Phillips and Pittman, 2009). Moreover, this means that the community is often part of the problem while also being a source of possible solutions. By working in the community, the youth worker also gets to know the (potential) pillars of the youth's environment, such as a local entrepreneur who wants to give young people a chance by offering an internship or a part-time job, a committed neighbor whose heart is in the right place, or a sports school owner who had been 'wild' in his youth and likes to train with groups of young people (Metz, 2011). The community approach thus involves a wide range of stakeholders, from civil society actors and various local institutions (NGOs, associations, companies, stores, public service institutions) to decision makers (council, government). Addressing different stakeholders in order to empower local communities is the main aim of Zavod Bob's practice in Slovenia. Street workers from the Netherlands emphasize two aspects of binding the community (Metz, 2011). On the one hand, it is about making the community accessible and receptive to the input of young people by promoting their interests within community institutions and creating spaces of acceptance of young people by the community (Metz, 2011). On the other hand, it is about motivating young people to participate in community. This last point is also emphasized in the practice of street workers in Portugal, since they are primarily focused on community mobilization and meaningful community participation. In the Czech Republic, street workers focus more on the integration of the individual into the community in order to prevent possible stigmatization of individuals.

How is street work different from other approaches?

One of the most common mistakes when thinking about street work is to think that it is just youth work, social work or education that is implemented outside of institutions, 'on the streets'. We believe it is much more!¹¹

Street work has as many faces as there are street workers. You can often hear a street worker saying that he or she is the most important asset in the job, meaning that the implementation of street work relies heavily on the personal profile and intuition of each worker (sometimes even more than their academic background). This also means that a team of street workers will be highly diverse and interdisciplinary, and the differences between workers will be emphasized as a virtue.

It is an outreach approach! Street workers go out to meet the people from their target group in their own environment. This is meant not only in the geographical sense, but also in the sense that we meet their needs, interest and talents. Consequently, there is no universal programme of structured activities for street work. On the contrary, the way it is carried out largely depends on specific groups and/or individuals.¹²

Street work means supporting participation. On the ladder of participation,¹³ street workers always strive to reach the highest level: youth-initiated, shared decisions with street workers. Enabling and supporting participation can have many positive impacts, especially when reflecting on the experience afterwards. This can lead to strengthening competences for participation in a wider context (e.g. community, society), making a positive change, democratic decision making, inclusiveness, teamwork, communication, etc.

Street workers respect the streets. During their daily work, a street worker becomes well aware of the dynamics of the streets, i.e. the relations, habits, activities, and rules that were established long before they started to work in a specific place. This means

¹¹ We are not saying that programmes implemented within institutions (e.g. youth centres, social centres, community centres) do not have similar characteristics; in reality, some of them do and some of them do not. We would like to emphasize, however, that the necessary elements of street work are only optional in the case of institutional work.

¹² To understand this process, see the chapter The Steps of Street Work.

¹³ https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf

not being invasive when working on the street, being aware that the youth are your equals, leaving institutional frameworks (e.g. bureaucracy and pre-set rules) behind, and only setting up new rules and frameworks together with the youth, after trust has already been built. Furthermore, respecting the streets also means being aware that street workers are in the youth's life environment, which gives them insight into their social networks, relationships, dynamics, behaviors, etc., and puts them in a unique position to get to know and understand the youth.

Street workers adopt informal approaches¹⁴ – they keep it simple (in their ways of communicating, explaining, informing, etc.) and present themselves as people, not only as employees or clerks. Since the work takes place during young people's leisure time, there is no obligation for them to participate, as many of them have had bad experiences with formal systems (e.g. early school leaving youth with formal education, unemployed youth with the labour market).

The process is more important than the result. This is not just a phrase; it is street worker's daily reality. It means that we give priority to the learning process and development of each individual over only striving to achieve the final result. It also means that we give more importance to the dynamics of participation and the well-being of participants than to how the result will appear.¹⁵ It should be said, however, that an important part of the street workers' job is also to detect the results of their work and present them in a way that the relevant stakeholders (managers, policymakers, financiers) will perceive as an accomplishment. Moreover, street workers also think about the impact of their work and strive to extend its influence to the wider population or area.¹⁶

Focus on what is strong and not on what is wrong! Each individual, group or community has its own needs, conflicts, and problems, but it also has its assets,

¹⁴ One of the possible, more informal approaches is a peer approach, meaning street workers emphasize a characteristic perspective they share with the youth (e.g. age, life experience, migrant background, history of drug abuse). When considering a peer approach, a strict professional line has to be drawn between the 'peer' street worker and young person.

¹⁵ To understand this, we can think of an example activity: making a bench. Street workers will focus on all the competences that young people will strengthen during the process (planning, implementing and evaluating) of building the bench. They will pay attention to the dynamics in the group, the potential conflicts, the well-being of each individual, etc. From this perspective, the final result – the bench itself (the look, the materials, etc.) – is less important.

¹⁶ Let's go back to our previous example of building the bench. We said that the bench itself was not the focus of the street worker's job. But to think about how this bench will impact others, the local community, public gatherings, etc., and if the impact can be wider, is also an important task of the street worker.

inspirations, motivation, and talents. Street workers always try to shift their approach from a needs-based one to an asset-based one. With an asset-based approach, young people get a positive experience and the feeling of being valuable – they become the agents of change.

Street workers invest in trust, because they are well aware that trust is not something that can be taken for granted; even when it is built, there is no guarantee that it will last. This makes more sense if we consider that street work takes place within the youth's own territory, and building trust means that street workers can start supporting young people in their process of learning, empowerment, growth, and improving their well-being.

Street workers are patient, and we could say that this is one of their greatest characteristics. They know it takes time to build trust, to be focused on the process, to work with young people's assets, etc. This also means they respect their clients' pace and do not force their own.

Street workers act outside the box, meaning they are:

- flexible with their approaches (when, where, what), since every day brings new situations and new dynamics;
- innovative when working with the most vulnerable youth and addressing specific life situations (standardized measures cannot be applied to street reality);
- creative and use the resources available (materials, infrastructure, etc.).

The steps of street work

In this chapter you will get familiarized with the process of street work. The practices from the Netherlands, Portugal, the Czech Republic, and Slovenia are different, but share a lot of common ground in the process of street work.

We arranged the steps that different practices use in four different phases of the process. These are the research phase, planning phase, core phase, and finishing phase. The steps that are presented here can overlap, and some steps can be repeated.

Phase	Steps
Research phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mapping and observing/analyzing the culture and behaviour of the neighborhood youth - doing background research on the location or community (historical, social, and cultural context) - making contact with people within the neighborhood - consulting with the stakeholders (schools, local councils, local NGOs, etc.) and informing them about your mission
Planning phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identifying the problems and assets of individuals, groups, and the community - networking - making the action plan of implementation
Core phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being present at the location or in the community - identifying the leaders and other members of the groups - carrying out individual, group, and community activities - supporting young people with individual problems - redirecting pupils to institutions that support youth and to other forms of leisure activities for youth - maintaining contact with cooperation partners/ residence and locals
Finishing phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reflection and evaluation - exiting the environment



**CHARACTERISTICS
OF STREET
WORKERS**

As already stated, we could say that the street worker her_himself is the most important asset of street work. Keeping this in mind, it is very important to reflect who s_he has to be in order to ensure the quality of its implementation. Just as we argued that street work is more than just social work or youth work that is carried out on the streets, the same goes for the street worker – s_he has to have specific characteristics needed for the specific work context. Below we listed the core characteristics, as we identified them, that street workers should possess to be able to do quality street work.

Personality traits:

- Empathic,
- adaptable,
- social (communicative),
- creative,
- innovative,
- open minded,
- perseverant.

Competences:

- Able to self-reflect,
- eager for personal growth and development,
- able to work in teams,
- proactive,
- tolerant (without prejudice),
- project work,
- able to follow procedures,
- able to initiate activities,
- able to do basic research and analysis,
- acts ethically and with integrity,
- able to recognize needs and assets of youth,
- able to work with people and form working relationships with them,
- network and cooperate with other organizations and institutions,
- practical skills,
- cultural sensibility,
- social skills.

Education and experience:

- Formal or non-formal education in the field of social sciences,
- education or training in youth work and street work,
- experience with project management
- experience working with young people.

Other characteristics:

- Flexible schedule,
- interested in new trends of youth work (social marketing, information technology, social media, community),
- can handle pressure and feedback,
- passionate about working with youth.

The characteristics and competences listed above are common to all street workers. When thinking about these traits, however, we also have to take into account the specific practices of street work in a given local or national context, and the particularities of the addressed topic and target group. For example, street workers working with migrants have to understand the historical and geopolitical background of migrations, have knowledge about administration procedures, and preferably also speak (at least the basics of) the target group's native language.

Furthermore, when examining the quality of street work, it is not enough to look at individual street workers. Since street work is always performed in pairs or teams of street workers, it is essential that the pair/team works in synergy (meaning that each individual supports the actions of other members), that members are complementary to each other (e.g. in their specific skills and approaches), and that the relationships among members are stable and wholesome (the relationship within a pair or group of street workers often represents a positive ideal for the target group).

To read more:

- <https://www.streetchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/on-the-streets-guide-for-social-street-workers.pdf>
- Jaquelyn Kay Thompson: Caring on the Streets - A Study of Detached Youth workers



**GUIDELINES FOR
THE PRACTICE OF
STREET WORK**

This closing section is oriented towards the real-life implementation of street work practices. In it, we present some core principles that we all take into account while planning and implementing street work. These principles are not derived solely from the theoretical bases presented in this publication, but also from our working experience in the field. They are not meant as strict rules, but rather basic guidelines which will help you do your job successfully. It is up to you and your team to decide how to use them.

Being well equipped and prepared to practice street work is very important to all of us. This means that we have all the needed materials (mobile phone, informational flyers, etc.) and knowledge about street work, its aims, and its advantages. We also emphasize the need to trust our colleagues and rely on them. Our team has to have supervision or intervision support. When preparing for street work, we also consider safety and ways to prevent exposure to different hazards (working in pairs, letting others know where we are, etc.). Lastly, we think workers need fair payment for the work they do.

We are very aware of **professional boundaries** while working. This means that we are aware of the worker's professional power and their participants' vulnerability, and vice versa. As street workers, we use physical boundaries (e.g. uniforms), emotional boundaries (e.g. knowing and understanding the participants' feelings but not feeling emotional distress because of them), and mental boundaries (e.g. knowing the opinions of young people but not adopting them as your own in order to remain in a good relationship with them) to protect ourselves and our participants from being drawn too far into each other's lives and from being manipulated or violated by others.

As street workers we do not wait around, but we **go to where the young people are** and **make contact** with them. This means that we observe and meet young people in environments that were chosen by them and where they feel comfortable. We introduce ourselves, our organization, and our work, and create opportunities (game of Frisbee, graffiti art session, etc.) for them to talk with us and start **establishing a relationship based on trust**. While working with young people, we detect their **needs and talents** and implement activities that answer them. To be able to go where the youth is, we need to explore the environment and **map the location** where young people gather. We keep in mind that we have entered an environment that is not ours. When working, we have to **respect the rules that are established in a specific environment** and adjust our work so that we are not too invasive. When exploring the environment, we try to get to **know its history and the ethnic background of the people** we make contact with.

In the implementation phase we consider the **participation of young people** to be necessary, because we build activities based on the needs, talents and interests of the youth. This means that we encourage young people to decide what they would like to do next time and support them at organizing activities for the whole community (soccer tournament, concert, etc.). After these activities, **reflection and evaluation** of the process together with the youth is a must. The last step that has to be implemented is the **exiting strategy**, which prevents the disappearance of street workers overnight and gives participants the possibility of becoming totally independent at solving their problems, empowering them to build on their talents.

We have to keep in mind the principle of **inclusion** of different people in our work. One of our goals is preventing social exclusion. Sometimes it can be difficult to include everybody in an activity, because different people have different needs and talents, but it is vital so that all participants have the same possibilities and learn to live together. This is why our activities are **low-threshold** (i.e. the minimum requirements of participation are very low).

If you are reading these lines, you have reached the end. All in all we hope you have gained an insight into the theoretical outlines of street work. If you would like to read more about the activities we carry out and the topics we address within street work, you are invited to read our handbook, which will be released in 2020. It will contain a description of activities we often use in our work, with instructions on how, when, with whom, and why to use them.



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